

Smuin Orchestra

By Richard Van Wagoner

Another popular musical group in the early days of Lehi was the Smuin Brother's Band, which was formed by James and Joseph Smuin, cousins of the Kirkham Brothers. The two groups were contemporary and as early as 1880, Smuin Brothers were playing for dances in the Lehi Music Hall, with James Kirkham serving as caller for the square dancing.

For a time in the mid-1890's, the Kirkham and Smuin Brothers string bands combined forces to increase their flexibility. But this joint venture eventually was discontinued and the groups went their separate ways.

In addition to the Smuin Brothers, James Smuin's children Melvin, Lester, and Mame eventually joined the orchestra as did his son-in-law Henry Thomas and a nephew Marvel Comer. Over the years, old time band members included James B. Gaddie, George Kirkham, John W. Jones, John Potts, William Kirkham, and James Carter.

Most of the musicians in the Smuin Orchestra, including their violin playing leader, were self taught. Jim Smuin was a deliveryman for the People's Co Op, though music was his first love. At most, band members never made more than \$5 per person playing for dances. Moreover, in the days of the horse and buggy, a trip to and from Cedar Fort or Fairfield was a major journey. On one occasion while returning home from Cedar Valley in a blizzard, band members feared they would become lost in the terrible storm. A strange light appeared immediately in front of the horse and the animal followed the glow home into the Smuin barn.

After more than thirty years playing for dances at Saratoga, Murdock Resort, the Pavillion, the Lehi Commercial and Saving Bank, the Union Hotel, and other places far and near, Jim Smuin decided to build his own

dance hall. The Smuin Dancing Academy, at 65 West and Second North, opened on Halloween Day, 1913, with a dance sponsored by the seven piece Smuin Orchestra. The modern sixty-two by one hundred-twenty one foot facility, complete with a spring dance floor, hosted hundred of dances until it was converted into an apartment building during World War II.

The Smuin Band continued playing dances at the Academy and elsewhere until it was discontinued during the depression. Members at the time of the group's demise were James B. Smuin, Wayne Thomas, Audrey Thomas Wilson, Sam Webb, and Jay Cardon. Smuin, the band's leader, died in 1939.